MEETING PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE:

THE LIBRARY'S NEW PLACE IN A DIGITAL WORLD

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Who would have thought that in our lifetime, we could answer any question instantly through a voice-activated search on our smartphone? Or have online subscription services deliver products ranging from clothes to groceries to toys to toiletries directly to our doorsteps? Or have online ads show us products and services we're already searching and shopping for—or predict what we might purchase next?

The era of personalized, instant gratification is omnipresent, and as these experiences become more common, people begin to expect them in every facet of their lives—digital and physical. Whether we're shopping for a sweater or booking a vacation, we expect service providers to fill our needs with ease, speed, and an unparalleled level of convenience.

As our expectations evolve, service providers must evolve too. They must fully understand how expectations are changing and create inventive approaches for meeting these expectations—and today's service providers include libraries.

THE ERA OF INSTANT GRATIFICATION:

UNDERSTANDING PEOPLES' EVOLVING EXPECTATIONS

Digital experiences have created liquid expectations. The experiences and expectations people have in one sphere or industry have spread into every other area of their lives.[1] People wonder why, if new socks can be on their doorstep in two days or less, a library book can't arrive with the same speed and convenience.

As a result, libraries and other service providers face competition not only from direct competitors who offer a similar product or service. They face competition from experiential competitors who offer experiences that replace their product or service and perceptual competitors who change the expectations people have for all products and services.

Liquid expectations have given rise to the mindset: **I want what I want when I want it.** People expect immediate results and value in everything they do. For example, Netflix knows that when browsing, people who don't see something that interests them within 60 to 90 seconds shift their attention elsewhere.[2]

And now, people also expect **tailor-made** experiences. As the digital world continues to refine people's experiences based on personal traits, behavior, and preferences, people are trained to expect this convenience in every area of their lives.

78% of customers are more likely to be repeat customers if a brand engages in **targeted, personalized offers**.[3]

35% of Amazon's purchases are generated by their **personalized recommendation** engine.[4]

59% of online shoppers believe **personalization** makes it's easier to find interesting products.[5]

SO, HOW CAN LIBRARIES KEEP UP WITH THESE **EVOLVING EXPECTATIONS** IN OUR DIGITAL WORLD?

BIG OPPORTUNITIES

Libraries can meet evolving expectations by paying attention to how tech companies are creating these expectations in the first place: through **big data** and **artificial intelligence** (AI). These terms are thrown around a lot today, at their most basic "big data" refers to large data sets that are mined to reveal trends that guide business decisions.[6] And "artificial intelligence" or "AI" refers to computer systems designed to emulate human thinking and intelligence.[7]

> " BIG DATA AND AI ARE THE DRIVING FORCES BEHIND THE **CONVENIENCE AND PERSONALIZATION** TAKING OVER THE DIGITAL WORLD. "

Big data and AI are the driving forces behind the

convenience and personalization taking over the digital world. They make it possible for Netflix to offer personalized movie suggestions, Siri to generate a playlist you love, Waze to reroute you to avoid traffic, and Alexa to order you a pizza.

Libraries are in a prime position to take advantage of these tools, because they have a rich resource for big data right at their fingertips: library catalogs. Library catalogs are filled with information about library users, collections, and intellectual content, much of which isn't currently being used to its fullest potential.

If libraries can take the data they already have and connect it to the interests and needs of library users, they can create the same powerful, personalized experiences taking place in the digital world. Of course, using patrons' personal data to create extremely personalized experiences raises important ethical questions.

BIG RESPONSIBILITIES

While personalization offers ultimate convenience, it can also promote biases if personalized recommendations aren't curated carefully. Luckily, librarians are skilled at promoting balanced perspectives through thoughtful curation and can apply this skill to big data and AI projects.

How? By unlocking unseen ideas. Rather than channeling patrons down an informational path that goes deeper into a bias, librarians can deliver information that is relevant to a patron's interests in creative ways through **intellectual context**. In the library world, intellectual context is a relationship between resources, the people who contribute to those resources, and the concepts within those resources. Library metadata is a good example of intellectual context.

Think about the old card catalog: there's a card that represents the resource, a card that represents the author, and cards that represent the concepts included in the resource. You can create connections and find recommendations for a patron based on all these pieces of metadata. The further out you go, the more unseen ideas you unlock. These ideas are still connected to your patrons' personal interests without being so closely connected that they promote a limited perspective.

CARD CATALOG

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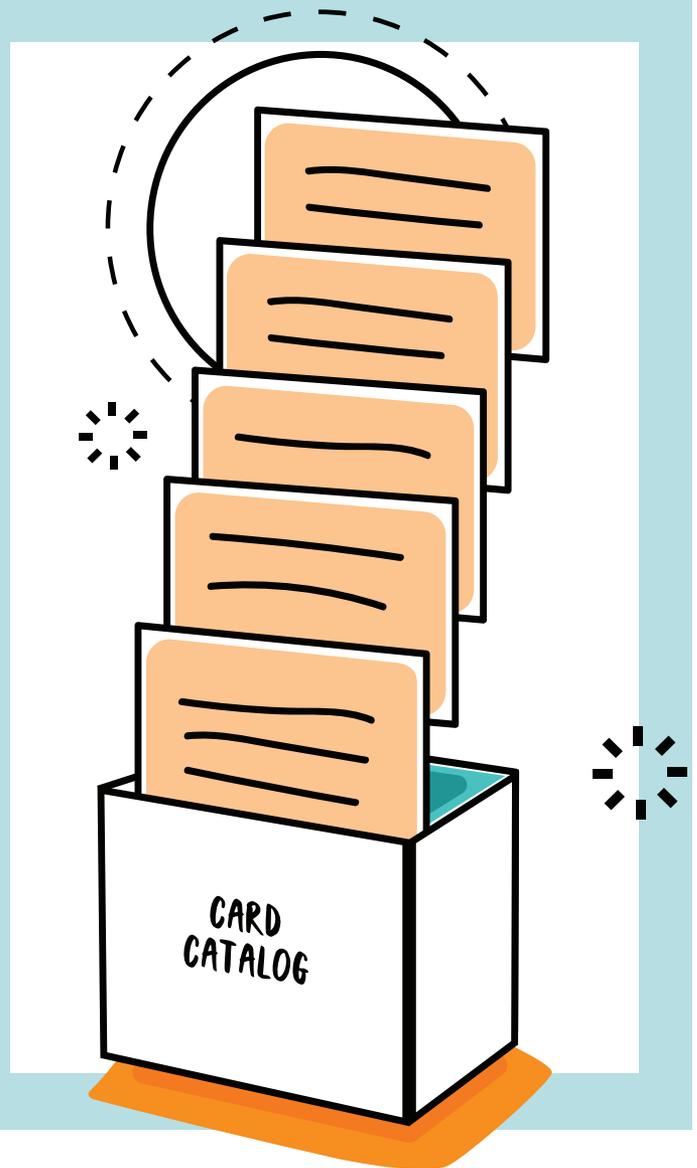
CREATING CONTEXT IN A DIGITAL WORLD

Once you've developed a strong layer of intellectual context, you can overlay it with **user context**. User context includes information like a patron's interests, institutional affiliations, format preferences, and demographics. At this point, you can also consider what personal information a patron allows you to use, creating an incredibly rich user experience that still respects privacy.

Emerging tools and technologies, such as the new Vega Discovery tool from Innovative, link a resource or topic to related concepts, authors, and resources. This allows people to focus on a related concept, connect it to a new series of related concepts, authors, and resources, and build a rich network of ideas.

AN EXCITING FUTURE FOR LIBRARIES AND PATRONS

Imagine a world where patrons can ask Google to check out a library audiobook and listen to it immediately. Or receive personalized library recommendations based on online behavior like Facebook likes. Or take a library quiz that gathers information about their interests, favorite genres, and format preferences and then receive personalized electronic resource recommendations or "library subscriptions" for physical items.

These are just some ways libraries could combine the power of technology with library values to deliver an impactful service that meets patrons' evolving expectations in a digital world. There are a lot of important discussions that need to continue before we turn this future into a reality, but libraries have a unique opportunity to create experiences that truly matter to people today.

ENDNOTES

1   https://www.fjordnet.com/conversations/liquid-expectations/

2   https://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=2843948

3   https://www.infosys.com/newsroom/press-releases/Pages/digital-consumer-study.aspx

4   https://martechtoday.com/roi-recommendation-engines-marketing-205787

5   https://www.invespcro.com/blog/online-shopping-personalization/

6   https://www.oracle.com/big-data/guide/what-is-big-data.html

7   http://www.ala.org/tools/future/trends/artificialintelligence

ABOUT INNOVATIVE

Innovative builds and delivers technology solutions that enable libraries to connect people with information all over the world. Innovative offers one of the most comprehensive portfolios of library automation products on the market today, serving academic, public, national, corporate, special libraries, and consortia. Headquartered in Emeryville, California, Innovative has a global presence—serving thousands of libraries in 66 countries and offices worldwide.

To learn how Innovative can help your library meet people with new experience for today's digital world, contact us at sales@iii.com.